



NEWS UPDATE

Plea to end 'patch and mend'

Users of IT in major companies and public sector bodies are fed up with software suppliers releasing unfinished and untested products they have to "patch and mend", according to new research published this month.

Nearly three quarters of the IT directors and managers surveyed felt that software was released too soon, to generate increased revenue and market share. David Roberts, chief executive of The Corporate IT Forum (tif.) which carried out the survey, says: "We have to break the patch and mend cycle that's blighting many corporates... corporate IT must not be a testing ground for unfinished products."

The survey was carried out among the forum's subscribers, which include senior IT directors and managers from 148 of Europe's largest organisations - including 50 per cent of the FTSE 100.

Most respondents were highly critical of software quality and software suppliers. Ninety-four per cent said they did not expect perfect software, but they did expect it to avoid well-known vulnerabilities.

Around 70 per cent said the software industry oversells its products when it comes to ease of support (72 per cent), ease of installation (70 per cent) and performance (66 per cent).

Updating software with patches to fix bugs and security vulnerabilities can be enormously time consuming - with some software needing to be patched almost daily. As a result, many IT departments are not able to keep their software up to date and are therefore exposed to security risks.

Gerhard Eschelbeck, chief technology officer of US vulnerability management company Qualys, has found that the average internal IT system is 62 days behind with the latest patches, while the average IT system connected to the internet is 21 days behind. Qualys found this out by doing 6.5m system scans over two-and-a-half years.

So huge is the patch updating task that it is possible to buy software, such as UpdateExpert from US-based St Bernard Software, that helps manage the instal-

lation of patches for Microsoft software, for example, in small to medium-sized businesses. It says which new fixes are available and whether they could conflict with other software.

Mr Roberts believes the solution is for IT managers and suppliers to work more closely together. His forum has developed The Relationship Development Programme, which he says is "designed to bridge the gap between users and suppliers - giving direct, raw, multi-customer input on a subject."

One suggestion that gained a high level of support (70 per cent) in the forum's survey was that suppliers should share the risk of project failure with users. However, Mr Roberts concedes that "user attitudes and procurement processes have played a part in where we are today."

More from: www.tif.co.uk, www.stbernard.com, www.qualys.com/laws

Nokia's Colombia deal

Nokia has won a \$90m GSM expansion deal with Comcel, América Móvil's affiliate in Colombia. Under the agreement, Nokia will provide GSM/EDGE and General Packet Radio Service network equipment, allowing Comcel to increase network capacity and expand coverage to smaller cities where GSM has not been available,

to keep pace with demand for mobile services in Colombia.

As part of the network expansion, Nokia will provide additional Nokia NetAct operations support system platforms. Comcel is the largest mobile operator in Colombia, one of the most dynamic markets in Latin America.

Challenge of VoIP

Voice over internet protocol (VoIP) phones without wires could start to replace standard cordless phones in the home, according to US semiconductor company Broadcom. It has designed a new chipset which enables a wireless VoIP handset to be built for around \$140, the price of a top of the range cordless phone.

The phone, which will connect to the internet over Wi-Fi wireless Lans, can be used for web browsing and e-mail as well as to make telephone or video calls over the internet. It will have two chips instead of four and be available in the first quarter of 2005.

Bloomberg message alert

Next time you send a message from a Bloomberg terminal, you could be told whether your message complies with financial regulations. Orchestra, a UK-based software vendor, has struck a deal with Bloomberg, the

financial information company, that will see its software used across millions of Bloomberg messages worldwide. If it spots anything non-compliant the message will be stopped before it is sent. The first customers will get the system next month and the majority in the first quarter next year.

Plea on GPRS charging

The complexity associated with GPRS [General Packet Radio Service] pricing must change, according to Philip Low of research consultancy BroadGroup, which has produced a report on the charges for this form of high-speed mobile data in 31 countries.

"Bundling with Wi-Fi or 3G imposes new constraints on GPRS tariffs, which in turn suggests that current structures are not sustainable if congruence in pricing is to be achieved," he said.

Mr Low found that the average price for 10 megabytes (MB) of inclusive GPRS volume stood at €12.80 (about \$15.77). But he said that, though prices were broadly similar in Western Europe below 50MB of use, there are a multiplicity of taxes, excess charging tiers, roaming definitions and pricing and billing increments, which will confuse users and delay adoption.

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Getting the message: Bloomberg terminals will be loaded with compliant software

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